

ARTICULATED ELEMENTS AND METHODS FOR USE

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application incorporates by reference and claims the benefit of U.S. provisional application serial number 60/432,558, filed December 10, 2002; and U.S. provisional application serial number 60/432,563, filed December 10, 2002.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to the art of fasteners and methods of fastening and, in particular, to a fastener apparatus having flexibility and wide range of uses. The invention finds particular application in any procedure where control of the insertion path of a fastener in a confined space are necessary, and can serve to fasten, capture, snare, cut, secure, grip, move, manipulate and perform other operations on materials or objects.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Stapling is a means for fastening materials together. Staples are usually U-shaped lengths of wire that are pushed through material and bent over on an anvil. A variety of specific stapler devices exist which are application-specific (i.e., circular staplers, linear staplers, etc.).

[0004] Other devices are used for attachment, snaring or grasping an object to capture or move it, permanently or temporarily. This broad category of devices involves a variety of tools and techniques, and some applications require specialized tools to function in a limited space.

[0005] The need exists for fasteners, snares, cutting and gripping devices that may be deployed in a confined environment in a flexible manner that can be used with confidence. The present invention contemplates new and improved devices and methods for fastening, attaching, securing, snaring, cutting, moving, manipulating or gripping objects that overcome problems with other devices and methods for achieving such results.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] The present invention meets the needs for improved flexibility and capability in devices used for fastening, snaring, cutting, attaching, moving manipulating, gripping and the like.

[0007] One preferred embodiment of the present invention relates to a one-step attachment device, a method for utilizing such a device, and the final fastener produced thereby. The device described herein has the ability to form specific and controllable fasteners of designated shapes and configurations.

[0008] More generally, this preferred embodiment of the present invention uses an outer, hollow fastener material that can be partially compressed at designated areas (i.e., a compression member) and an inner activation or tensioning member. The compression of the outer fastener material occurs at one or more flexible areas or compression features specifically located on the longitudinal axis of

the material. As a result, the outer compression member is capable of being distorted or bent to produce a predetermined configuration.

[0009] Along these lines, the inner tensioning member is preferably movably positioned within the outer compression member. It is also operably connected with the outer compression member for selectively applying compression to the outer member by placing the inner tensioning member under tension. When tension is applied to the inner tensioning member, the portion of the outer compression member containing the flexible areas becomes deformed producing, for example, a curved shape or loop. The final configuration of the outer compression member is dependent upon the amount of tension applied by the inner tensioning member and the overall design of the flexible areas of the compression member.

[0010] In this regard, the flexible area(s) are preferably designed to be located on substantially one side of the longitudinal axis of the outer compression member, but may be placed on different sides of the outer compression member to make complex fastener shapes. Thus, dependent upon the number, size and shape, and location of the flexible areas, a wide variety of designs can be created upon activation or tensioning of the compression member.

[0011] Preferably, the compression member is tubular, i.e. circular in cross-section. However, other cross-sectional configurations, such as other geometric shapes or combinations of geometric shapes, may be used.

[0012] The present invention can be independently utilized to perform a task, or it can be used in conjunction with a deployment device to itself place or use another tool or instrument. Consequently, multiple techniques and methods of usage are possible for the present invention, and its uses are many.

[0013] The device of the present invention is useful in the process of attaching one portion of material, whether physical or biological, to another. Additionally, it is useful in other applications where it is necessary to form specific shapes and perform specific functions such as grasping, clamping, cutting and snaring.

[0014] The device of the present invention has the ability to form standard and unique shapes. Moreover, with the addition of a piercing tip, the device is capable of simultaneous penetration of a material and fastener coiling, as well as independent control of these actions. This makes it possible to insert and produce a complete fastener while operating motions are contained or limited to one plane of movement.

[0015] In another aspect, the present invention is directed to a fastening device comprising an outer, hollow, tubular type compression member and an inner tensioning member slidably movably received therein. The outer tubular compression member is designed in such a manner that when the inner tensioning member is activated (or tensioned), the compression member is at least partially compressed along at least a portion of one side of its longitudinal axis. For example, the outer tubular compression member can be configured to have various degrees of material thickness with one side (i.e., the rigid side) of the tube being thick-walled and the other side (i.e., the flexible side) being thin-walled at selective places. The inner tensioning member is operably connected with the compression member for selectively applying compression to the compression member. When the tensioning member is activated, the flexible, thin-walled or flexible side of the outer tube will at least partially collapse and the compression member will assume a

curved shape. By adjusting the composition of the flexible, thin-walled side, various curved or loop-like configurations can be produced.

[0016] Similarly, the flexible side of the compression member can be notched, grooved, indented, cut or slit at one or more locations to the same or different depths, widths or angles. Upon activation by the inner tensioning member, the compression member will be at least partially compressed or bent in one or more designated locations. Alternatively, the flexible side of the compression member can be corrugated, and/or corrugated and slit, grooved, indented, etc., allowing for deformation to occur on that side.

[0017] Moreover, one or more areas of the flexible side of the preferred tubular compression member can also be structurally weakened, such as by chemical etching, abrasion blasting, etc. In such an aspect, the tubular compression member will preferentially bend in a predetermined manner to form the desired, non-linear fastener shape.

[0018] The compression member may also be made of sections having different sections connected serially. Such sections may be rotated and adjusted by the user to customize the shape and produce a desired configuration upon compression. Use of one or more tensioning members extending through or along the sections can make possible the application of compressive forces as desired on all or portions of the sections.

[0019] Thus, the compression member can be formed from a continuous material, or from a series of discontinuous sections, or combinations thereof. If formed of a contiguous material, uncut areas of the material, preferably tubular, can act as a backbone or as a series of hinges, allowing for deformation of the material at the "link" interfaces

[0020] In a further aspect, the invention is directed to a one-shot (i.e. staple-like) attachment formed from a device comprising at least a hollow compression member and an inner tensioning member. The compression member is preferably tubular in configuration and is designed such that when it is compressed, it deforms and/or aligns along predetermined locations. The deformation and/or alignment are limited by the design and configuration of the material of the compression member and the amount of tension applied. Thus, for example, a u-shaped fastener with a rigid center portion and movable tips on the ends that start out perpendicular to the rigid center portion may be inserted and re-configured into the flattened "B" shape of a compressed standard staple by applying tension via the inner tensioning members to compress the compression members that form the movable tips.

[0021] In this regard, one side of the compression member is designed to be more flexible than the other side. In turn, the tensioning member is operably connected with the compression member for selectively applying compression to the compression member when the inner tensioning member is placed in tension. For example, the distal end of the tensioning member can be attached to the distal end of the compression member. The proximal end of the tensioning member can then be placed under tension resulting in deformation of one side of the compression member to form a curved surface or loop.

[0022] In this aspect of the invention, the compression member can be constructed in several ways. It can be made of a hollow linear member having flexible and rigid sides. Additionally, it can comprise divided interfacing or interconnecting links having predetermined areas of collapse or movement when under compression. The interconnected links of the compression member are designed such that when they are placed under compression and are pulled

together by the tensioning member, they stack in a prescribed fashion to form a specific shape. Consequently, the compression member can be formed from a one-piece material having a rigid side and at least one flexible side, or by forming individual sections and separately stringing them together to form a rigid side and a flexible side, or a series of rigid and flexible segments along the compression member. The term links and sections may be used interchangeably in describing the invention, as both types of devices described immediately above are useful in practicing the applications described herein, although one may be more effective than another in a particular application. Groups of links or sections may also be referred to as segments herein.

[0023] In still another aspect, the present invention is directed to a device for fastening materials. The device comprises a hollow tubular compression member and a tensioning device. The compression member is designed in such a manner that when the tensioning member is activated or tensioned, the compression member deforms or compresses on one side of its linear axis so as to form a predescribed shape such as a circle, ellipsoid, etc.

[0024] In another further aspect, a fastening device is provided. The device comprises a preferably tubular member which can be compressed at one or more flexible areas located on one side of the tube to form a permanent or semi-permanent shape, such as a curve or loop, when a tensioning member is tensioned or pulled through or along side the compression member. Preferably, the compression member is formed of small gage stainless steel tubing and the tensioning member consists of a stainless steel line or cable. However, other types of materials include, but are not limited to, metals (such as titanium, Nitinol™ or other memory alloys, or any biocompatible metal or alloy), resorbable or non-

resorbable polymers, natural materials, ceramics, or combinations thereof. One or more notches, slits or cutouts are present on one side or alternate sides of the preferably tubular compression member to produce the flexible areas, although alternatively such features can result from a compression member made of a series of sections as described above. The tensioning member is operably connected with the compression member in such a manner as to compress the flexible areas of the compression member upon application of tension

[0025] The compression member may also be formed of material that fails to produce a permanent shape upon compression. In such an embodiment, the end of the tensioning member can be attached to the compression member in order to maintain the compression member's shape or configuration. Alternatively, several approaches can also be utilized in order to maintain the pressure on the outer compression member subsequent to activation. These approaches include the activation of one-way cable-retention clamps, securement devices, or other apparatuses, welding, crimping and the like, as discussed further below.

[0026] The device of this aspect of the invention can be deployed manually, but also in combination with an insertion device such as a catheter. The device can be deployed while simultaneously or systematically tensioning the line or cable. Simultaneous and independent fastener insertion and curvature can be accomplished by independently controlling the extension of the fastener and the cable tension. When the device is curved and placed where desired, the end of the tensioning device can be fixed, such as attached to the compression member, and released from the outside tensioning provider.

[0027] In an alternative embodiment to this aspect, the deformation areas of the side wall(s) of the outer compression member can be adjusted to produce the

curve, loop or overall configuration desired. In this regard, weaker or thinner sections will deform earlier than the stronger or thicker sections. This allows for a method of designing various shapes, formations and functionality into the compression member.

[0028] In another aspect, the device of the present invention preferably consists of an outer, hollow tubular compression member and an inner tensioning member. The tubular compression member comprises of a plurality of notches on one side or is made up of a plurality of tubular sections. The application of tension to the tensioning cable causes the tubular section to curl and thereby creating a loop. The end of the tensioning member is then attached, clamped, locked, welded, sealed, or crimped to the outer tubular member in order to sustain or maintain the tension.

[0029] Alternatively, a removable inner tensioning cable may be applied. In such an application, the inner tensioning member is designed to break free from the compression member of the fastener or clip under higher forces than are required to form the fastener. This application is particularly beneficial in circumstances wherein the mechanical strength of the post-tension fastener or clip is produced by the material (e.g., stainless steel, Nitinol™, other metals and materials, memory materials) of the compression member.

[0030] In another aspect, the present invention relates to a fastening device comprising two or more compression members that are initially linearly arranged (i.e. in series) and a tensioning member. The outer compression members are operably interconnected in such a manner to produce a non-linear fastener upon activation of the tensioning member. The individual compression members can be designed to produce certain non-linear configurations upon activation. Such a device allows for

straight insertion and controlled curling upon activation. Additionally, several individual compression members can be utilized in order to produce multiple loops for one fastener. As with the other embodiments disclosed above, such a device can be manually used or deployed through (i.e. from the inside of) another deployment tool. By way of example and not limitation, deployment tools may include sleeves, tubes, hoses or catheters.

[0031] In a further aspect, the present invention concerns the use of a compression member and a tensioning member to produce a capturing or clamping device. The structure of the capturing or clamping device is similar to that of the fastening device wherein a loop or desired shape is formed at the point at which the object is to be grabbed or captured. This device offers an advantage over alternative capture, snaring or removal devices in that the loop can be introduced and removed in a straight format while taking the shape necessary to grasp the object once it is positioned near the object.

[0032] Another advantage of this aspect of the invention is its ability to curl around and compress against the object to be removed. Traditional snaring devices consist of loops that must be slid over the end of an object. They are impractical when the ends of the object are not reachable or are of a size and geometry that prevents a loop from sliding over an end.

[0033] In a similar aspect, the present invention is directed to the self-coiling snare or capturing device discussed above further incorporating materials and a system that enables the capturing device to be heated, cooled or otherwise energized (i.e., cauterization, burning through the material, etc.) to effect the material or object that it is contacting. In such an aspect, the coiling and capture device is activated (either manually, mechanically or electromechanically through

another tube or scope) to loop around material and activate a further device associated with the capture device.

[0034] In a still further aspect, the present invention relates to a self-coiling fastener or attachment clip comprising a hollow compression member and a tensioning member described above. The tensioning member is attached at, or operably connected to, the distal end of the compression member. The proximal end of the tensioning member is then tensioned, such as by pulling it through the compression member, while restraining the proximal end of the compression member. This results in one side of the compression member being deformed to form a curve or loop.

[0035] The attachment clip produced above can then retain its shape by the permanent deformation of the material produced above comprising the compression member. Alternatively, when the desired deformation has occurred, the tensioning member can be fixed or secured to the compression member. Accordingly, the attachment clip can retain its shape by the tension produced by the secured tensioning member, by permanent deformation of the material of the compression member, or some combination of the two.

[0036] This aspect of the invention can also be used to fix or join multiple objects, materials or tissue to each other. Such a self-coiling attachment clip has particular applications in the fields of construction, manufacturing, equipment maintenance, complex motion, garments, hobbies and novelty items, medicine, etc.

[0037] In a related aspect, the above-described attachment clip can be delivered and/or located by means of a deployment device, which by way of example and not limitation, may include sleeves, tubes, hoses or catheters. In one

such embodiment the compression member has an inner channel for an inner tensioning member. The distal end of the tensioning member is affixed to a puncturing or piercing needle that has a diameter greater than the diameter of the inner channel of the compression member. When such a needle is deployed through a deployment device, the needle is used to puncture the target material and the inner tensioning member is used to pull the needle back towards the compression member, and the compression member deforms and compresses against and/or into the target material.

[0038] Alternatively, the present invention relates to a self-coiling attachment clip that is designed to mimic the shape of a needle and may have a tip that allows the user to puncture the material. The clip has a tensioning cable that may mimic traditional joining threads or other material.

[0039] The above-described aspects can also be utilized in a deployment device with multiple combinations of puncturing needles and attachment clips. Further, these aspects can be embodied in a single or multi-tube configuration. Moreover, these aspects also relate to a delivery/locating system with one or more separate puncturing needles and clips that can be advanced or withdrawn as needed.

[0040] Furthermore, by varying the structural characteristics of the compression member of the above-described device, the spacing of features, the shapes and patterns formed, and complex shapes other than simple curves or circular coils can be formed. This allows the fasteners, attachment clips, etc., to be used in ways that competing clips, fasteners, clamps, cutters, snares, and staples, cannot.

[0041] In still another aspect, the present invention relates to use of the compression and tensioning members described above to create structures beyond a simple curve or coil for attachment/suturing. The compression member with one or more tensioning members can be used to create cylindrical-like structures or continuous corkscrew-shaped fasteners. Similarly, custom fastener length, multiple coils and multiple sizes are also possible. Additionally, as a result of its compactness (given that it can be delivered in a linear form initially), it can be delivered in small spaces from one side to fasten a material where conventional fasteners cannot due to size limitations, etc.

[0042] In another additional aspect, the present invention concerns a material-eluting, self-coiling fastener or attachment clip. In such an embodiment, the compression member and/or the tensioning member may contain or be coated with an adhesive, chemical, materials with specifically desired magnetic or electrical properties, pharmaceuticals or other agent(s) that promote attachment, sealing or some other desired effect.

[0043] In an additional further aspect, the present invention is directed to a self-coiling fastener, attachment clip, clamp, cutter, snare, etc., comprising a compression member and a tensioning member, wherein indices concerning the direction the orientation are also included. In certain applications, it may be important to know and control, prior to application of the fastener, clip, clamp, cutter or snare, etc., the direction the compression member of the device, will deform or curl under tension. This can be managed and controlled through a number of apparatuses including, but not limited to: a tensioning cable feature such as a marking, a notch, a bump; an applicator feature such that the applicator indicates the orientation of the clip; an applicator feature that forces the clip to exit the

applicator in a specific orientation; and, a preformed initial shape of clip (prior to tensioning) that indicates attachment clip orientation (for example, the clip could be curved such that the concave side indicates the coiling direction).

[0044] In another aspect of the present invention, a device capable of forming a substantially circular configuration is provided. The device includes an outer compression member and an inner tensioning member, both having proximal and distal ends. The tensioning member is at least partially disposed within the compression member. Various types of attachment means allow the distal end of the tensioning member to selectively communicate with the distal end of the compression member to produce the deformation of the compression member desired.

[0045] In a further aspect, a method for fastening material includes providing material to be attached and positioning at least a portion of a device, including a tensioning member at least partially disposed in a compression member, in a fastening relationship with a first portion of the material. The compression member is partially secured and the device is partially deformed by applying tension with the tensioning member to compress the compression member. At least a portion of the device is then placed in fastening relationship with a second portion of the material and the fastener is more fully deformed by further activation (i.e., pulling) of the tensioning member. This brings the material together and creates a knot-like structure.

[0046] In an additional aspect, a method for manipulating a fastener in a confined space includes inserting a fastener, including a compression member with a proximal end and a distal end and a tensioning member at least partially disposed within the compression member and including a proximal and a distal end, into the

confined space. The proximal end of the compression member is partially secured and the surgical device is deformed to a predetermined configuration by tensioning or pulling the proximal end of the tensioning member. Other manipulations of the fastener may include procedures such as the snaring of an object, cauterization and formation of a structure, cutting or clamping, in the confined space.

[0047] The advantages and benefits of the present invention will become apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art upon reading and understanding the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0048] The invention may take form in various components and arrangements of components, and in various steps and arrangements of steps. The drawings, in which like reference numerals denote like components throughout the several views, are only for purposes of illustrating preferred embodiments and are not to be construed as limiting the invention.

[0049] FIGURE 1 is a top view of an exemplary fastener apparatus in accordance with the present invention;

[0050] FIGURE 2 is a side view of a component of the exemplary fastener apparatus of FIGURE 1;

[0051] FIGURE 3 is a perspective view of the exemplary fastener apparatus of FIGURE 1 in a semi-activated state;

[0052] FIGURE 4 is a perspective side view of the exemplary fastener apparatus of FIGURE 1 in an activated state, with different attachment means;

[0053] FIGURE 5 is a front view of a retention device used in accordance with the present invention;

[0054] FIGURE 6 is a side view of the retention device of FIGURE 5 with a portion of an exemplary fastener apparatus;

[0055] FIGURE 7 is a perspective side view of the exemplary fastener apparatus of FIGURE 1 in the process of being deployed in material, with different attachment means;

[0056] FIGURE 8 is a perspective side view of the exemplary fastener apparatus of FIGURE 7 in a fully deployed state;

[0057] FIGURE 9 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus in accordance with the present invention, with different compression features;

[0058] FIGURE 10 is a perspective side view of the exemplary fastener apparatus of FIGURE 9 in a semi-compressed state;

[0059] FIGURE 11 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus in accordance with the present invention with curved hypodermic needle means of deployment;

[0060] FIGURE 12 is a perspective view of an exemplary fastener apparatus in accordance with the present invention with a double tube means of deployment;

[0061] FIGURE 13 is a perspective view of an exemplary fastener apparatus in accordance with the present invention with a single tube means of deployment;

[0062] FIGURE 14 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus in accordance with the present invention with a hinged advancer means of deployment;

[0063] FIGURE 15 is a side view of the fastener apparatus and hinged advancer means of deployment of FIGURE 14 at a phase in the process of deployment; and

[0064] FIGURE 16 is a side view of the fastener apparatus and hinged advancer means of deployment of FIGURE 14 at another phase in the process of deployment.

[0065] FIGURE 17-A is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus in accordance with the present invention.

[0066] FIGURES 17-B to 17-G are alternative embodiments in cross-section of FIGURE 17-A at line A-A.

[0067] FIGURE 18 is a side view of the fastener apparatus of FIGURE 17 in a fully deployed state.

[0068] FIGURE 19-A is a side view of a portion of an exemplary fastener apparatus in accordance with the present invention.

[0069] FIGURE 19-B is a side view of the fastener apparatus of FIGURE 19-A in the process of deployment.

[0070] FIGURE 20 is an exemplary alternative configuration of the fastener apparatus of FIGURE 19-A.

[0071] FIGURE 21 is a perspective top view of a section of the fastener apparatus of FIGURE 19-A.

[0072] FIGURE 22 is a perspective bottom view of a section of the fastener apparatus of FIGURE 19-A.

[0073] FIGURE 23 is a perspective top view of an alternative configuration of a section for the fastener apparatus of FIGURES 19-A and 19-B.

[0074] FIGURE 24 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus of the present invention deployed in a helical shape in an application fastening a device to a body.

[0075] FIGURE 25 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus of the present invention deployed in a helical shape in an application expanding or supporting the inside of a tubular structure.

[0076] FIGURE 26 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus of the present invention deployed in a helical shape in an application plugging the inside of a tubular structure.

[0077] FIGURE 27 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus of the present invention deployed in a helical shape in an application clamping and occluding a tubular structure.

[0078] FIGURE 28 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus of the present invention having compression features at different locations on the device to produce different shapes.

[0079] FIGURE 29 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus of the present invention having compressions features at different locations to form a knot-like structure.

[0080] FIGURE 30 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus of the present invention having exemplary thinned wall sections serving as compression features, and showing an exemplary displacement detection sensor.

[0081] FIGURE 31 is a side view of an exemplary fastener apparatus of the present invention having exemplary bellowed wall sections serving as compression features, and showing an exemplary coating.

[0082] FIGURE 32 is a side view of an exemplary fastener of the present invention in an application having a plurality of devices supporting a membrane.

[0083] FIGURE 33-A is a side view of an exemplary fastener of the present invention in an application having a plurality of devices supporting a membrane in a deployed state producing an occlusion in a tubular structure.

[0084] FIGURE 33-B is an end view of the fastener of FIGURE 33-A showing the membrane in a deployed state.

[0085] FIGURE 34 is a side view of an exemplary fastener of the present invention in an application snaring an organ.

[0086] FIGURE 35 is a perspective view of an exemplary fastener of the present invention in a representative application, deployed to connect two reinforcing rods.

[0087] FIGURE 36 is a perspective view of an exemplary fastener of the present invention in a representative application having a cutting edge or heated edge, deployed to cut or seal an elongated portion of material.

[0088] FIGURE 37 is a side of an exemplary fastener of the present invention in a representative application having a cutting edge in a stage of deployment poised to cut an elongated portion of material retained by a loop of the fastener.

[0089] FIGURE 38 is a side view of an exemplary fastener of the present invention in a representative application illustrating frangible containers and a representative detail configuration of cutting edges of FIGURE 36.

[0090] FIGURE 39 is a perspective view of an exemplary fastener of the present invention in a representative application as fingers separating and holding tissues back from an incision.

[0091] FIGURE 40 is a schematic view of the fastener of the present invention in a representative application as a valve assist clamp for representative systems of a human.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0092] Turning now to the drawings, wherein the showings are for purposes of illustrating the preferred embodiments of the invention only and not for limiting the same, FIGURE 1 shows a device **10** of the present invention. The device **10** includes a tensioning member **12** that is movably disposed within a compression member **14**. The compression member **14** may be a hollow tube having an inner diameter ("ID") and an outer diameter ("OD"). It is comprised of material, including without limitation metals and plastics (as will be described in greater detail below), and includes a distal end **16** and a proximal end **18**.

[0093] The tensioning member **12** may be a single strand or multiple strands **20** of material, such as a metal or high strength plastic cable or rope or other materials. In some applications, the tensioning member may also be designed to include some elasticity to allow some flex in the compression member after it is compressed. The tensioning member includes a distal end **22** that corresponds to the distal end **16** of the compression member **14** and a proximal end **24** that corresponds to the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14**.

[0094] A retainment or attachment member **26** is present at the distal end **22** of the tensioning member **12** to selectively hold, retain or attach the distal end **22** of the tensioning member **12** within or to the distal end **16** of the compression member **14**. The retainment member **26** may take various forms, as will be shown below, and is illustrated in FIGURE 1 as a simple knot in the distal end **22** of the tensioning member **12**. The knot is larger than the inner diameter ID of the compression member **14** to prevent the distal end **22** of the tensioning member **12** from sliding inside of, or completely through, the compression member **14**. In some

applications, the tensioning member may be attached to the compression member at positions other than the distal end of the compression member to make sections of the compression member operable. In addition to the knot shown in FIGURE 1, the tensioning member may be attached to the compression member by other means, including without limitation, by fasteners, welding, crimping, sealing and the like.

[0095] The proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12** extends past the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14** to allow the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member to be grasped or operated separate from the proximal end **18** of the compression member, as will be described in detail below. In some applications, the proximal end may reside inside the compression member and be attached to an adjustment device operable by the user, including without limitation devices such as a fine screw adjustments, slides, dials, levers, gears, wheels, and the like, operable manually or electronically.

[0096] The compression member **14** defines flexible areas or compression features **28**, such as notches, present on one side of its longitudinal axis, as shown in FIGURES 1 and 2. However, a wide variety of alternative configurations are also available. The flexible areas or compression features **28** are configured in a manner to allow for deformation of the compression member **14** in a desired direction upon the application of a compression force by the tensioning members upon activation. Alternative configurations may include compression features such as slots, weakened, etched or thinner areas **120** (FIGURE 30), and opposing slanted surfaces which may run along all or part of different sides of a compression member **14**, as discussed more fully below.

[0097] Turning now to FIGURE 2, the compression member **14** may be a one-piece hollow tube that defines the flexible areas or compression features **28**, or it may be a series of interconnected individual links with compression features **28** defined in between the individual links (see FIGURE 17-A). The compression features **28** are designed to allow the compression member **14** to deform to a predetermined configuration as, for example, in FIGURE 18. Preferably, the compression member is tubular and generally circular in cross-section. However, other cross-sectional configurations, such as representative geometric shapes or combinations of geometric shapes, illustratively shown in FIGURES 17-B through 17G, may be used.

[0098] Referring again to FIGURE 2, a spine **30** may form a contiguous and rigid portion of the compression member **14**. Additionally, the flexible areas or compression features **28** are shown as notches of a predetermined design to allow the compression member **14** to form a loop-style deformed configuration. The flexible areas or compression features **28** are present on the flexible side of the compression member.

[0099] Alternatively, as shown in FIGURES 19 through 23, the compression member may also be made of sections **90** having different sections connected serially (see FIGURES 19 and 20). In this embodiment, substantially solid sections stacked in series have compression features such as angled, beveled or protruding surfaces **86** or surface features **92**, as shown illustratively in FIGURES 21 and 23 that cause the stacked sections **90** to compress to a desired shape. Advantageously, these sections **90** may be kept in alignment by an inner spine **30** running through an inner channel **31** in each section **90**, or by a tensioning member **12** running through or along the stacked sections **90**. Where a tensioning member

12 runs along the stacked sections, the sections **90** may optionally include a guide or loop to retain the tensioning member when it is in tension. Regardless, in either case, surface features on opposing surfaces of the sections **90**, such as detents **88**, and mating features, such as protruding surfaces **86**, can be provided to help lock sections in a desired relationship. Such surface features also permit a user to rotate and adjust individual sections or segments to customize the shape and produce a desired configuration during use the device when compressive force is applied in accordance with the present invention. Use of one or more tensioning members extending through or along the sections make possible the application of compressive forces as desired on all or a portion of the sections **90**.

[00100] Referring again to the embodiment of the invention shown in FIGURE 2, the dimensions of the compression member **14**, including the width **32**, angle **34**, spacing **36**, shape and exact design of the compression features **28** will vary depending on the particular application (i.e., without an insertion device or with a deployment device, etc.) and the specific parameters (such as the size of the tensioning member and the desired shape of the compression member **14**) involved.

[00101] The device **10** of the present invention may also be provided with a sleeve or material covering (not shown), which will serve to prevent pinch points and to protect against debris interfering with compression features **28**.

[00102] With reference to FIGURE 3, deformation of the device **10** is shown. The device, as a fastener, may be used with or without an insertion device **38**. For reference, use with an insertion device **38** is illustrated. The proximal end **18** (referring back to FIGURE 1) of the compression member **14** is grasped and held or fixed, while the proximal end **24** (FIGURE 1) of the tensioning member **12** is grasped and pulled for activation. The act of pulling the proximal end **24** of the

tensioning member 12 places the inner tensioning member 12 in tension and causes the retainment or attachment means 26 to contact with and place the compression member 14 into compression. For example, the knot at the distal end 22 of the tensioning member 12 may contact the distal end 16 of the compression member 14, and with continued tension in the tensioning member 12, cause the flexible areas or compression features 28 of the compression member 14 to become compressed.

[00103] In this regard, the compression member 14 compresses about the compression features 28, which, as described above, are designed to produce a desired configuration of the compression member 14 upon deformation. The action of the distal end 22 of the tensioning member 12 on the distal end 16 of the compression member 14 continues once compression of the compression member 14 has begun, facilitated by the strong, yet flexible properties of the inner tensioning member 12. As compression of the compression member 14 continues, the design of the flexible areas or compression features 28 causes one surface 40 of the compression member 14 to be placed into compression and another surface 42 of the compression member 14, i.e., the spine 30, to be placed in tension and plastically deform. The apex of these forces may occur at a predetermined location 44, where opposing walls 46 that define the compression features 28 at the apex close upon one other, while opposing walls 48 not at the apex are still a significant distance apart.

[00104] As FIGURE 4 illustrates, a substantially completely deformed fastener, shown here as a substantially closed loop, is formed with continued tension of the inner tensioning member 12 imparting compression upon the compression member 14. As mentioned above, the retainment or attachment means 26 may take several

forms, including a sphere **50** in which the distal end **22** (FIG. 1) of the tensioning member **12** is fastened (such as by crimping, ultrasonic welding or other means known in the art), and which in turn contacts the distal end **16** of the compression member **14**. When the fastener is in a substantially finally deformed configuration, a significant portion **44** of the compression member **14** includes the apex of the compressive forces.

[00105] When the compression member **14**, and thus the fastener, has deformed to the desired configuration, the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12** can be attached to the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14** and any remainder of the tensioning member **12** protruding outside of the proximal end of the compression member **14** can be detached. This may be performed in a number of ways.

[00106] For example, a unidirectional cable retention apparatus, as known in the art, may be used. Turning to FIGURES 5 and 6, a retention apparatus **52** defines slots **54**. While the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14** and the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12** remain grasped, the tensioning member **12** is passed through the slots **54** in the retention apparatus **52**, and the apparatus **52** is slid down the tensioning member **12** until it contacts the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14**. Flaps **55** created by the slots **54** cooperate to create a force that causes the retention apparatus **52** to lock onto the tensioning member **12**. As a result, the tensioning member **12** is held in place at the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14** by the retention apparatus **52**. Any portion of the tensioning member **12** extending substantially beyond the retention apparatus **52** may then be cut and removed.

[00107] Other means of attaching the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12** to the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14** include crimping the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14** at the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12**. Similarly, a separate swage fitting may be crimped on the tensioning member **12** just past the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14**.

Also, a wedge lock, which is a protrusion that allows the tensioning member **12** to be moved only in one direction (i.e., the direction of pulling for tension), may be used in the compression member **14** at or near the proximal end **24**, or the inner diameter of the compression member **14** may be shaped to create a wedge lock. Other one-way locking apparatuses, such as cam-type devices and detent mechanisms may be employed. Moreover, the means of attachment of the tensioning member **12** to the compression member **14** at their respective proximal ends **24** and **18** may be by an ultrasonic or other type of weld, which may also be used to trim any excess portion of the tensioning member **12**.

[00108] Various means are described herein to retain, temporarily, adjustably, and permanently, the inner member in tension to hold the shape of the outer member.

[00109] Once the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12** is attached to the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14**, any one of several forces may cause the device **10** to retain its deformed shape (referring back to FIGURE 4). First, attachment of the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12** to the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14** keeps the tensioning member **12** in tension, thus keeping the compression member **14** in its deformed position. Second, the deformation of the compression member **14** may be permanent, causing the compression member **14** to remain in its deformed position. If only this

plastic deformation force is desired, the tensioning member **12** may be removed from the compression member **14** (as will be described below). Third, a combination of the tensioning member **12** in tension and plastic deformation of the compression member **14** may cooperate to keep the compression member **14**, and thus the device **10**, in its deformed position.

[00110] In this manner, the formation of a strong fastener device **10** with minimal space requirements, i.e., by grasping only the proximal ends **18** and **24** of the components, is achieved. With reference to FIGURES 7 and 8, use of the fastener **10** to join disconnected materials is illustrated. A first material **56** and a second material **58** are to be joined. The fastener includes a piercing tip **60** as the retainment or attachment member **26** to attach the distal end **22** of the tensioning member **12** to the distal end **16** of the compression member **14**. The piercing tip **60** allows the fastener device **10** to pierce the material **56** and **58** with minimal space and without the use of an additional needle, drill, punch or the like, or the additional step of creating an aperture, if desired. Also, if desired, the insertion device **38** may be used to deploy the fastener.

[00111] As shown in FIGURE 24, at the micro-scale, this configuration of the device may be used to deploy a fastener attached to or extending from, by way of example and not limitation, a Micro- ElectroMechanical system (MEMs) device **94**, monitor, lab on a chip, pharmaceutical chip, etc; or alternatively, at a larger scale, attach any known implantable device. The device **10** may provide permanent or temporary attachment of a device **94** to a specific location in a human or animal where the device **94** acts to fulfill physical, electrical, pharmaceutical or medicinal treatment purposes. As an alternative to the fastening shown in FIGURES 7 and 8, FIGURE 24 illustrates that attachment may be made to a single piece of material or

tissue using a loop or preferably a helical configuration of the device **10**. It may also be understood from Figure 24 that the loop or helical configuration of device **10** may be designed to encircle and thus fasten or bundle together a plurality of generally parallel or closely aligned materials.

[00112] Referring again to FIGURES 3 and 7, the compression member **14** is moved forward from the insertion device **38** to cause the piercing tip **60** to penetrate the first material **56**. The compression member **14**, having the tensioning member **12** disposed in its inner diameter, is moved partially through the first material **56**. The proximal end of the compression member **18** (referring back to FIGURE 1) is grasped and the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12** (FIGURE 1) is pulled to cause the compression member **14** to begin to deform to a shape dictated by the compression features **28**, which is shown as a loop. When the piercing tip **60** has curved to approximately 180 degrees from its insertion angle, the entire fastener is pulled in a rearward direction, causing the piercing tip **60** to penetrate the second material **58** (FIGURES 7 and 8).

[00113] Alternatively, instead of pulling the entire fastener rearwardly to engage the second material, the compression member **14** can merely be further compressed to engage the second material. Utilizing such a technique, the piercing tip **60** will then engage the second material to produce a compressed fastener.

[00114] As FIGURE 8 illustrates, once the piercing tip **60** has penetrated the second material **58**, the fastener device **10** may again be moved forward to allow more of the fastener to pass through the first **56** and second **58** material. The proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12** is pulled more, causing the compression member **14** to in turn deform more and form a loop. As the loop is formed, the first **56** and second **58** materials are drawn together. The proximal end

24 of the tensioning member **12** may be pulled even more, so as to cause the piercing tip **60** to pass through the first material **56** a second time. When the first **56** and second **58** materials are secured by the fastener **10** in the desired position, the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12** is attached to the proximal end **18** of the compression member **14**, as described above, and any remainder of the tensioning member **12** protruding outside of the proximal end of the compression member **14** may be optionally removed or cut off. It is important to note that the fastener may secure two materials **56** and **58** together, or it may secure one material **56** to some other object, or may secure two portions of the same material, as desired.

[00115] Turning to FIGURES 9 and 10, the fastener device **10** may include various forms of compression features **28**. These features **28** may include notches, as previously described, or corrugations **62**. The corrugations **62** compress (FIGURES 10 and 31) to facilitate the formation of a pre-designed configuration upon compression of the compression member **14**. Also, the flexible areas or compression features **28** may include the use of a thinner wall **96** (FIGURE 30) than the remainder of the compression member **14**, again leading to the formation of a pre-designed configuration upon compression. The considerations described above regarding the compression features **28** apply to all of the forms that are utilized.

[00116] Various means are described herein to compress the compression member. For example, a bladder (not shown) in the inner member may be expanded or contracted to cause motion of the outer member, or piezoelectric elements (not shown) may be used on the outer or inner member to create motion. Similarly, bi-metallic or expansion differential of materials for temperature based bending may be utilized. A collection of sections **90** with surface features, such as

protruding surfaces **86** or posts to adjust which way the device bends (i.e. dynamic determination of bending pattern). See FIGURES 19 and 20. As well, a collection of multiple discs with multiple pins could allow independent control of larger segments of the fastener. Similarly, multiple inner tension members connected to individual segments of the device could also be used for control of separate sections **90** or segments or for ones of a group of devices **10** (FIGURE 33-A). Tension members can also be configured to provide for stronger forces, for applications such as those shown illustratively in FIGURES 18, 25, 26, 27, 35, 36 and 37, or tuned to special needs of an application, such as illustratively shown in FIGURES 8, 33, 34, 38, 39 and 40..

[00117] When the fastener device **10** is used without an insertion device **38**, the fastener may be inserted in alternative manners. For example, the proximal end **18** (referring back to FIGURE 1) of the compression member **14** may be held by a clamp or pliers or similar device to control the pushing of the fastener **10** through material. A piercing tip **60** (FIGURE 7) may be used to allow the fastener to pass through the material. When deformation is desired, a second tool may be used to grasp the proximal end **24** (FIGURE 1) of the tensioning member **12** and pull it to deform the compression member **14**.

[00118] As an alternative to the deployment of the fastener device **10** without an insertion device, different types of devices may be used. For example, a straight, hollow tube structure **38** as shown in FIGURE 3 and 7 above may serve to position and allow control of the fastener. This tube structure **38** may be a needle, nail, punch, drill, torch or similar tool that punctures the material for the fastener, and through which the fastener is then inserted to the material. In addition, a curved tool **64**, such as a hypodermic needle, as illustrated in FIGURE 11 and useful in a

medical application, may be used to insert the fastener. A curved tool **64** would assist in the placement, control and deformation of the fastener, as it forms a portion of a possible configuration of the compressed fastener, i.e., a loop.

[00119] With reference to FIGURES 12 and 13, other insertion devices may include a double tube system **66**, wherein a first tube **68** houses a puncturing needle **70** that pierces the material for the fastener. When the material is pierced, the needle **70** may be drawn back into the first tube **68** and the fastener **10** then inserted through the punctured material. The fastener **10** is controlled via a second tube **72** that may be connected to the first tube **70**. As shown in FIGURE 13, alternatively, a single tube system **74** may house both the puncturing needle **70** and the fastener **10**.

[00120] Turning to FIGURES 14-16, a hinged applicator **76** may also be used as an insertion device. The applicator **76** includes a body **78** that removably houses the fastener, a hinged tip **80** connected to the body **78** at a hinge point **82** and an activation lever **84** for the hinged tip **80**. The fastener may be fed through the body **78** of the applicator **76** in incremental fashion, as shown in FIGURE 14, thus remaining substantially straight.

[00121] When deformation of the fastener is desired, FIGURE 15, the hinged tip **80** may be activated by moving the lever **84** in the direction of the arrow **A**. The tip **80** pivots in the direction of the second arrow **B**, thus assisting the tensioning member **12** (referring back to FIGURE 1) in compressing the compression member **14** (FIGURE 1). Complete deformation of the fastener, FIGURE 16, is accomplished by pulling the tensioning member **12** in the direction of the third arrow **C** (as described above), causing the distal end of the fastener to move in the direction of the fourth arrow **D**, forming the predetermined shape.

[00122] Any insertion device may be equipped to insert multiple loads of fasteners, i.e., one fastener after another. Control over the insertion of the fastener and the deformation of the fastener to the final predetermined shape may be mechanical, electrical, or electro-mechanical. For example, the fastener may be inserted into a cavity through a catheter or scope, involving both electrical imaging and sensing and mechanical dictation of movement. In addition, insertion of the device **10** may be combined with lighting or imaging, such as fiber optic or light-emitting diode (LED) means **96** located at the end or along the device **10** (FIGURE 25). As well, a device with multiple tubes **68, 72** such as shown in FIGURE 12, with or without additional tools noted above, may be used to guide an adjoining tube to an individual target in a confined space and provide or remove a desired material or fluid for an application through the adjoining tube. For example, in medical applications tissue, or a fluid such as oxygen, water, saline solution, stimuli sensitive materials (such as those that gel upon changes in temperature, pH, or electrical conditions), body fluids or medicaments may be provided or removed through the adjoining tube. Further, the adjoining tube may be used to supply vacuum, fluids or power to an additional tool being used contemporaneously with or requiring supply from the device **10**. Using such devices permits the device of the present invention to exhibit added functionality.

[00123] The particular devices used to insert and/or control the device **10** may include features to indicate the orientation and / or depth of insertion of the deformed device **10** to allow for predictability of motion. Such features include a marking on the insertion device indicating the direction of curl or deformation or an insertion device that allows deformation in only one direction. Moreover, the device **10** may include features to indicate its final deformed shape, such as a slight initial

deformation indicating the final shape and direction of curl, or a marking on a component of the device **10**, such as on the proximal end **24** of the tensioning member **12**, indicating the direction of deformation. Alternatively, the device could include other means for indicating electronically that at least a portion of the outer compression element has been bent. For example, piezoelectric materials, load cells, stress or strain gauges, i.e. displacement detection sensors **98** (FIGURE 30) can be added to the outer compression member or inner tensioning member to detect and transmit signals relating to where, when and how much deformation is experienced in the device **10**, or whether a configuration which might be defined as "closed" is reached. The insertion and controlling devices for the device **10** may also include means to indicate the tension of the tensioning member **12** in the compression member **14**, thus showing the amount of deformation in the device **10** so that it can be manipulated accordingly.

[00124] In some applications, fine control of pressure applied by the device **10** is desirable, and feedback to the user through gauges, readouts or tactile sensation can be provided. Pressure sensors placed at the distal end or along the surfaces of the compression member in contact with a target object or material can be connected back wirelessly or through the device **10** to the proximal end of, or user contact point with, the device **10**; or alternately to a separate readout.

[00125] Thus, the device **10** of the invention may be deformed along a pre-determined axis to a desired configuration. Specific, controllable loop-type shapes may be achieved, including circles, ellipses (FIGURE 18), helixes **100** (FIGURES 24 – 27, and multiple-loop configurations. As well, the device may be designed with compression features that are positioned to permit some randomness in the final shape, where the application simply calls for the compression member to end up in

a final configuration which is non-linear, or tightly and randomly curled, as illustratively shown in FIGURE 29. The length of the device **10**, the number of coils formed by the device **10**, as well as the size of each coil formed may be dictated through the design of aspects such as the compression features **28**, described in detail above. A customizable structure that may be controlled from a single area, i.e., a proximal end of the device **10**, along a single plane of movement is achievable. As a result, the insertion depth and the curl of the device **10** can be controlled simultaneously in a confined space.

[00126] As noted above, the device **10** may be permanent or removable. To be removable, the tensioning member **12** may be configured to break free from the compression member **14** at an elevated force level, i.e., a force significantly greater than that necessary to deform the device **10** to the desired configuration. In such an instance, the compression member **14** may be designed to deform somewhat elastically, to spring at least somewhat open for easier removal, as described below.

In applications where devices **10** may be located on a permanent or long-term basis, the device may further include an RF tag as known in the art, to enable location for replacement or removal.

[00127] Of course, applications other than fastening and attachment of materials are possible with the present invention. For example, the device **10** may be used as a self-coiling snare **102**, as in FIGURE 34, to grasp materials, organs (as shown) or tissues and move them as needed in confined spaces. In such applications as a snare **102**, the surface of the snare may include adhesives, tackifiers, flexible materials, elastic or shock absorptive materials, textured surfaces and combinations thereof to enhance the interface of the snare **102** with sensitive tissues and materials.

[00128] When used in attachment applications in confined spaces, rather than loop over an end of an object to be grabbed, as done by devices of the prior art, the device **10** can be inserted using a minimum of space as a straight element beside the object, and be formed into a loop around a portion of the object, as in FIGURES 24, 26 and 27. Thus, the object can be grasped and moved by the device **10** without the need for locating an end of the object. Similarly, the device can be placed in a fastening relationship near a plurality of objects, and used to grasp or tie together a bundle of objects, as illustratively shown in FIGURE 35 .

[00129] The device **10** may also incorporate systems known in the art that allow it to be heated or otherwise energized to burn or seal materials, such as a heated edge **104** representatively shown in FIGURE 36. A representative heated edge **104** may be created by various means, including heating elements on a plurality of segments or sections of the device, or by a heated wire positioned externally in like manner as the tension member **12** shown in FIGURE 20, or a flexible heating element accompanying the device **10** positioned to contact a target material when the device **10** is deployed. Where the compression member is provided with an outer surface feature that includes a cutting edge **106**, the cutting edge **106** may be variously designed to be positionable to grip and excise, scrape or cut a portion of material in a place where access is limited or direct human contact is not desired, such as with biological, chemical or nuclear materials. In such burning or cutting applications, the device **10** may be made of any suitable material, but is preferably made of spring metal, as described below, to allow it to loop around objects, perform a burning, cutting or sealing operation, un-loop and be removed (see also FIGURE 37). As well, the device **10** may also incorporate a known cooling device, such as a thermoelectric device.

[00130] Moreover, as shown in FIGURE 25, the device **10** may be deformed to a helical configuration **100** or similar specific shape and then used as a structure or formation, such as a reinforcement device inside a tube or conduit, or alternatively may be inserted linearly in such an application and deployed. In this regard, the device **10** of the present invention is also understood to be a force multiplier, permitting the linear force of tensioning to be translated into lateral motion, with a degree of multiplication in lateral force being a matter of detailed design of the compression and tensioning members.

[00131] The device **10** and its components may be of any material compatible with desired applications, including various metals, alloys, polymers, ceramics or combinations thereof. Specialty metals, by way of example and not limitation, may include for medical applications stainless steel, titanium or alloys thereof such as Nitinol, and other medically accepted metals. As well, device **10** and at least some of its components may be made of dissolvable, biodegradable or resorbable materials. For example, in some applications the piercing tip **60** or cutting edge may be of a biodegradable material so that sharp edges are degraded within a short period of time after use, reducing the possibility of unintended further piercing or cutting of material.

[00132] It is also possible to include a spring-type material for components such as the compression member **14**. In such an instance, the compression member **14** may only elastically deform and remain in its deformed shape due to the tension of the tensioning member **12**. When the force of the tensioning member **12** is removed, the fastener may substantially resume its original configuration for removal. In addition to more traditional spring-type materials, other materials, such as Nitinol™ may be used to return the device to its original shape.

Alternatively, a pre-shaped device made of Nitinol may be used to assist in predetermining the desired shape of the fastener in use, so that the conditions of use, such as temperature, help support its function.

[00133] In addition, the materials used for the device **10** may be coated with other materials to provide added functionality to the device. As shown in FIGURE 31, coatings **108** include by way of example and not limitation, adhesives; pliable, cushioned or absorbent materials; or magnetic materials. In addition, functional surfaces may be provide on or connected to the device **10**, such as flattened surfaces shaped surfaces; heated or cooled surfaces; fixed or retractable roughened surfaces; fixed surface features or retractable surface features, including without limitation textures, bumps, pins or the like or interlocking profiles, operable via fluid (liquid or gas) supplied to a bladder or expandable volume, or by electrical or mechanical action; may be attached or applied to device **10** to enhance snaring, gripping, stabilizing, cutting, burning, fastening, separating or spreading. Additional coating agents or surface treatments to be applied to an object may be carried by the device **10** in accordance with the needs to snare, grip, stabilize, cut, burn, fasten, separate, spread or like activities enabled by the device to achieve some other desired effect.

[00134] Further, the device may include a plurality of frangible containers **110** (FIGURE 38) or pockets that rupture upon bending of the compression member **14** that release a substance to be applied to achieve a desired effect, such as those disclosed herein. Such substances may be coatings, sealants, adhesives, chemical agents to soften or harden material, and the like.

[00135] Still referring to FIGURE 38, In medical applications, coatings **108** or frangible containers **110** or pockets might also include pharmaceuticals, other

biologically active ingredients or natural agents to promote homeostasis or other desired effects in humans, plants or animals, antibiotics, anti-inflammatory drugs, hormones, cells, DNA, medicaments, pharmaceutical active ingredients, chemicals, nuclear materials and combinations thereof. The frangible container **110** itself may also be comprised of materials desired to be delivered to the point of use by the device **10**.

[00136] The device of the present invention may be applied variously in a wide range of product applications. As a fastener, the device may be designed to reach a predetermined configuration, such as an oval or link as seen in FIGURE 18, that serves as a temporary connector link, or with sufficient articulation to fit around objects such as reinforcing rods (shown in FIGURE 35) to serve as a permanent tie. As well, in various configurations, including a helical shape, it may serve in fastener as well as gripping applications as wide-ranging as a remote actuating device, temporary clamp for use in construction or other trades to a gripping device for the elderly, or like uses.

[00137] In an alternative configuration of the oval shaped device **10** of FIGURE 18, although not shown in FIGURE 18, the tensioning member **12** may include two strands, the distal ends of which are connected to each opposing end of the device, and the proximal ends of which exit the device **10** generally at its mid-point. In such an alternative configuration, the compression features **28** of the device **10** may also be designed to produce a configuration in which the opposing ends of device **10** move together to function in clamping, cutting and similar applications.

[00138] As well, although also not shown on the illustrative device **10** of FIGURE 18, compression features **28** may be provided so that the opposing ends of

the device **10** may be configured to form loops that overlap and interlock to form a complete link, as may be desired in some product applications.

[00139] In medical applications, the device **10**, in various configurations under compression, including but not limited to generally oval, circular or helical configurations, may be used to suture or clamp tissues together, or to temporarily move, lasso, stabilize, separate or retract tissues or organs as needed during surgery. The various features of the invention, such as elasticity in the tensioning member and surface treatments or features previously described may be advantageously used to enhance contact with tissues for these uses. Some examples of particular interest include using the device **10** (or a plurality of devices **10**) as a finger **112** to assist in the retraction of tissues for minimally invasive as well as conventional surgery (FIGURE 39); using the device **10** in a loop or helical configuration to provide a low impact heart lasso or snare **102** for retraction of a beating heart (FIGURE 34); or to surround the stomach as a band to reduce stomach volume; using the device **10** in a helical configuration **100** or similar specific shape as: a stent inside a vein or artery, or to provide vascular reinforcement during stent replacement, or to temporarily open an airway or other collapsed, inflamed or blocked tissue or gut, or to temporarily expand tissue in a vessel, tube or gut to expose an area for inspection, sampling, biopsy, analysis or surgery. The helical configuration **100** may also be used to externally surround and reinforce an aneurysm. The device **10** may also be used to provide occlusions, such as using the device **10** in a knot-like configuration (FIGURE 29) or in a helical configuration alone (FIGURE 27) or combination with a membrane **114** (FIGURES 32-34) on its distal end to temporarily or permanent occlude a vessel, tube, vein or artery, such as may be desirable during surgery or for temporary human or animal sterilization.

In applications where an occlusion is desired, the device **10** may also be used in a generally circular or helical configuration to externally clamp closed a vessel, tube vein or artery (FIGURE 27). Alternately, to form an occlusion the device **10** can be used in combination with a plug **116**, wadding or the like (FIGURE 26) inserted in a vessel, tube, vein or artery so that the device **10** can deploy in a generally circular, helical or other like form to clamp around the plug location and provide an occlusion.

[00140] Depending upon the particular application, multiple devices **10** may be used approximately simultaneously (FIGURES 33, 39). For example, an insertion device or multiple tube system, as shown in FIGURES 3 and 12, respectively, may be capable of introducing more than one puncturing needle **70** and/or device **10** at about the same time, so that multiple punctures could be made and multiple fasteners could be deployed. In addition, a first finger may be nested inside longitudinally another second finger, and positioned to slide outward from the end of the second finger, after which the first and second fingers may be selectively deployed, thus, effectively extending the reach of device **10**.

[00141] Deployment of multiple devices has multiple practical product applications. A plurality of the devices may be configured for use in applications requiring complex articulation, and support construction, manufacturing, medical and domestic needs. In particular, multiple devices may be configured to operate much like artificial fingers **112** (FIGURE 39) for uses as mundane as animal waste removal, to the interconnection of building materials (FIGURE 35), to sophisticated assembly line production, and microswitch actuators.

[00142] In medical applications, deploying multiple devices **10** permits multi-digit functionality, such as use of opposing devices (e.g. positioning two fingers **112** in opposition), or use of opposing ends of the same device **10** to function as forceps;

scissors; and retraction devices attached to surfaces such as those shown in U.S. Pat. No. 6,309,349, and as seen in the literature such as that by ESTECH, of Danville, California.

[00143] Additional medical applications of interest include use of the device **10** of the present invention as an implantable temporary or permanent support **118** for weakened muscles or valves, as illustratively shown in FIGURE 40, by way of example and not limitation, to support the gastric esophageal sphincter; or to assist relevant tissues and organs to prevent incontinence; or providing a plurality of devices **10** to assist peristaltic motion; or providing a valve for colostomy patients. In these applications, a pre-formed curvature from memory materials may be of value, as well as tensioning members having elastic or elastomeric qualities to permit relative movement as needed for proper functioning. As well, the device **10** can be provided with a mechanical or electrical actuator to change the position of the tensioning member and expand or contract the device, as the case may require.

[00144] Further medical applications of interest include using the device of the present invention to assist in inserting and operating expandable devices needed by surgeons during surgery to block or hold organs and other tissues away from areas in which they are working. See FIGURE 34. In addition to the configuration of snare **102** as shown, the snare could alternately circle the heart as illustrated in FIGURE 34, but rather than continue around the heart, instead wrap helically around the proximal end of the device **10**, forming a snare much like a slip knot. This alternate configuration, however, is not preferred.

[00145] As is apparent from the foregoing detailed description, methods for use of the device **10** are also disclosed. The methods comprises the placement of the device in a position for fastening, whether by physical location or insertion into a

material, deformation of the device **10**, and manipulation of the device **10** in accordance with the steps that are presented in the process detailed in FIGS. 1-16 above.

[00146] A further aspect of the present invention is that the device may serve as a novelty device. In this regard, the articulated outer compression member may be operated with the tension member to provide an amusing toy for children, as well as for pets, particularly when combined with external ornamentation and other surface treatments of the device. The inner tensioning member may be provided with a means to temporarily secure the novelty device in a desired position. The device may also be mounted at the end of another device or stick with the tensioning member operable by the user, to provide amusement to a pet, such as a cat. Further, the device of the present invention may be provided as part of a set of building materials for play, including interconnecting features on the sides of the outer compression members, such as loops, clips, male / female or other connectors to interconnect with other devices **10**, or with other components provided in a play set.

[00147] In yet a further aspect of the present invention, the device **10** may further be used in sports applications, including use at the end of a stick as a snare for animals, with the tensioning member operable by the user at the other end of the stick. Further, the device may be combined with a net and handle to produce a closeable net to capture butterflies, fish, small animals or other targets. In this regard, the handle could be attached to the device, where the inner tensioning member is operable by the user holding the handle, with a net attached to the handle. The net would be positioned with an opening, and the articulated device laced through the net so that application of tension to the outer compression

member will substantially close the net. Curvature of the device and force multiplication combine to rapidly close the net.

[00148] Finally, in accordance with the present invention, the device 10 may be further applied in the garment industry to provide clothing adjustment features through a loop which permits multiple size adjustments with a minimum of fastener elements. A single fastener and loop may be used for a wide range of adjustment. In addition, the clothing adjustment may also provide body shaping functionality, such as is possible in positioning the device 10 as a support element in female garments, such as an underwire in a brassiere to provide comfort and shaping for the wearer.

[00149] The invention has been described with reference to the preferred embodiments. Obviously, modifications and alterations will occur to others upon reading and understanding the proceeding detailed description. As illustrated herein, applications may be at the scale of a known fastening devices down to sizes useful with microscale and nanoscale devices. It is intended that the invention be construed as including all such modifications and alterations insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims or the equivalents thereof.